

Somerset Attempts a Remedy. 311

Commons to close and keep ;
Poor folk for bread to cry and
weep ; Towns pulled down to
pasture sheep ; This is the new
guise (fashion)."

The social reformers of Edward's reign were, nevertheless, no revolutionists. One of the most strenuous of them, John Hales, while penning a strong plea for social reformation, rebutted the charge of anarchy which his enemies hurled against him. " And doubtless they judge very evil of me that reporte that I would have libertie, libertie, and so a licentious libertie. As I am utterly voide of suche opinion, so on the other side, I will tell you plaine, I am not of that minde that I do allowe too much servitude and slaverie. Bothe libertie and servitude, if they be out of mesure, be bothe hurt-full, and the destruccion of every commonwelthe."

To deal with this state of matters, Somerset, with much profession of philanthropy—no doubt honestly meant, though he had very liberally helped himself to Church property—issued a proclamation against enclosures in June 1548, and sent commissioners into the counties to collect material for a petition to Parliament on the subject. They were hailed by the people as reformers after their own heart, and the petition which they drew up as the result of their inquiries shows that Latimer and his fellow-reformers had not exaggerated the evils they denounced. It demanded drastic remedies in the exemplary punishment of the law breakers. Needless to say, an interested Parliament would not listen to such propositions, and refused to pass the Enclosures Bill. " Though the Duke of Somerset," remarks Strype, " took all his pains and employed many honest men in this charitable work (of the commission) to put a stop to the impoverishing and dispiriting of the poor, and to heal their discontents, which he foresaw also a great danger in, yet such was the greedy avarice of the gentry, that all these endeavours proved unsuccessful; many great men at the court, and the Earl of Warwick, it seems, among the rest, backing them, being themselves probably guilty in that behalf."

Somerset nevertheless persevered in the work of social reform. He enjoined the commissioners to enforce the tillage Statutes and level illegal enclosures. But he was too weak to